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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KABUL 000605

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DEPT FOR SA/FO, SCA/A, S/CT, S/CR, SCA/PAB, EUR/RPM
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR AID/ANE, AID/DCHA/DG
NSC FOR AHARRIMAN
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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [NATO](#) [SNAR](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: NORTHERN GOVERNORS FOCUSED ON POPPY ERADICATION

Classified By: AMBASSADOR RONALD NEUMANN FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) & (D)

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: On February 17, the Ambassador met with the Commander of PRT Mazar i Sharif and held a joint meeting with Interior Minister Moqbel Zarar and five governors from the Northern provinces to discuss poppy eradication efforts in the north. The counternarcotics strategy in the North is gaining traction. All five governors emphasized that their individual provinces will see very little if any poppy cultivation this year, in contrast to high production in some Northern provinces last year (and in stark contrast to Helmand and other parts of the South). Zarar pressed the governors for results and made a strong pitch for zero poppy, whatever the cost, as the only way to establish a lawful state. The PRT Commander lauded the success of INL's poppy elimination program (PEP) public information campaign in the North, and said that their efforts are having a direct and significant impact on reducing poppy cultivation. The Commander asked that the PEP program be expanded. END SUMMARY.

"Quiet North" is Actually Very Active

12. (C) The Swedish PRT Commander in Mazar i Sharif, Jan Palsson, and Political Advisor, Ingrid Persman, explained that although it is quiet in the North, there is a great deal of political activity. Persman pointed out that although the North seems calmer than the South on the surface, in fact, a mix of powerful actors is engaged in a struggle for influence over smuggling and narcotics shipping routes. Persman added that it is in these power brokers' interests to keep things quiet, so they can continue with their business, uninterrupted. She continued that there is a strong anti-Taliban feeling in the North, in part due to the varied ethnic mix in the region.

PRT Focused on Helping Lower Level Officials

13. (C) Commander Palsson explained that the PRT's strategy for encouraging stability and good governance in the North is

a "bottom-up" approach; the PRT is working with Chiefs of Police and District Level Administrators with the expectation that good governance will eventually trickle up, since the PRT "cannot touch the big fish" in the region. The Commander explained that the PRT is intentionally not targeting Governor Atta in its good governance efforts because, in his opinion, the PRT "bottom-up" strategy will either force Atta to curb his corrupt activities or be removed from office. He added that three previous Chiefs of Police who were "criminals" have been replaced with "good ones," and the PRT is focused on supporting them to ensure they do not "slip into bad networks." Persman added that it would do no good to remove Atta unless there was a suitable alternative; she said that removal would create instability. The Ambassador commented that more efforts should be made to remove corrupt and/or criminal elements at the top of the power structure as well. By not doing so, we run the risk of losing the public's confidence in the efforts to bring about change. It is hard to build good governance at the bottom if the top behaves with impunity. The Ambassador agreed that this was not the time to change governors in Balkh.

Poppy Elimination Program: Great Work, Need More of It

¶4. (SBU) The PRT Commander noted that the INL-sponsored Poppy Elimination Program (PEP) efforts are excellent, and requested that the program be expanded. He said that Martha Barbosa, the Mazar-based PEP International Advisor has a "good connection" with Governor Atta, who listens to her. The Commander also felt that the PEP program would be a great asset to have in other provinces as well. He lauded the program's "good situational knowledge" and ability to put "an

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Afghan face" on the program's efforts. Post's Counternarcotics Task Force Director Doug Wankel noted that UNODC made similar positive comments about PEP's work.

Northern Governors Pledge Provinces Will Be Poppy-Free

¶5. (SBU) In a joint meeting with the Minister of the Interior, Moqbel Zarar, the governors of Balkh, Samangan, Sar e Pul, Jowzan, and Baghlan provinces all pledged that their respective provinces would be poppy free by the end of this year. Balkh governor Atta proudly announced that this year there was no need to eradicate in his province because he successfully prevented cultivation of the crop. Atta criticized the UNODC report that stated poppy was reduced by 34 percent last year in Balkh. He stated that the correct figure was 55 percent, and noted that UNODC only sent five inspectors who were unable to canvas the entire province, and thus underreported the actual eradication levels. Atta noted that this year he used the political process (vice guns or military force) to stop poppy planting. He explained that both the Provincial Council and other influential people were key in getting out the anti-poppy message.

¶6. (SBU) Sar e Pul Governor Munib said that he began a public relations campaign five months ago against drugs, and he is "hopeful" that poppy cultivation has stopped. He assured that he had the full support and cooperation of the locals, and that security forces would intervene if necessary to bring poppy cultivation to zero. Recently appointed Baghlan Governor Ishaqzai said that police reform is needed in his province to ensure successful poppy eradication. Ishaqzai said he had requested that the MOI assign 500 additional police to the province to help. Jowzjan governor Hamdard said that he has held 561 meetings in seven districts to "spread understanding" about preventing poppy cultivation. Hamdard added that in instances where poppy was cultivated, the meeting delegates forced the farmers to stop and eradicate the crops themselves. Hamdard said that there are three mountainous districts where eradication has not yet begun, but he is confident that Jowzjan will get to zero

poppy this year. Hamdard echoed Ishaqzai's comments about the police, noting that it was currently tribal-based, and it needs urgently to become a professional, nationalized entity that is not based on tribal loyalties. Samangan Governor Shafaq reported that he began a public relations campaign against cultivating poppy during this spring's planting season 15 days ago. A month ago Shafaq hosted a meeting for police chiefs, village elders, and religious leaders urging them to ensure that poppy is not grown in their districts. Shafaq proudly explained that three year ago, 2,400 acres of poppy was cultivated; two years ago 800 acres were planted, one year ago 300 acres were cultivated, and he was confident that this year the figure would be zero.

Governors Request More Reconstruction Help for The North

17. (SBU) All five governors individually asked for more reconstruction projects for the Northern provinces. A few expressed their disillusionment with the central government's lack of response in helping them provide basic services like potable water, roads and schools to their constituents. Governor Atta and others suggested that reconstruction money be funneled through the GOA, as opposed to non-governmental and international organizations, to help strengthen provincial government ties to the central government and allow them to ensure that the work is done properly. The governors asked that growth and development assistance be evenly distributed throughout the country.

18. (SBU) The Ambassador pointed out that it is important to show the U.S. Congress that significant efforts are being made to reduce poppy in order to increase the amount of assistance that is allocated for reconstruction projects.

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The Ambassador noted that it is challenging to funnel all reconstruction funds through government ministries because there are not enough people who are trained to manage the money, and the GOA has only spent 50 percent of the development budget that it controls. Similarly, while money is available for provincial budgets, provincial governments lack trained personnel who can design appropriate projects. Consequently, the money does not get distributed to the provinces. He concluded that government officials are being trained to manage money appropriately, we will move more money through the GOA in the future, but such training takes time.

Governors Want to Coordinate Arrests with ISAF

19. (SBU) All of the governors expressed concern about the risk of increasing poverty if alternative livelihoods are not found for farmers who quit growing poppy. They also appealed to the Ambassador for more assistance in dealing with narco-traffickers who they are concerned may try to sabotage the security situation in the North if their drug trade is interrupted. Governor Atta said that the provinces need to be able to coordinate with international security forces to arrest and prosecute narco-traffickers.

Governors Worried About Drought

10. (SBU) The governors also noted their concern about the possibility of drought. Sar e Pul Governor Munib said that 68,000 families in his province have been affected by drought already. He added that 6,000 families have already left the province, and 5,000 youths have left to seek work elsewhere. Jowzjan Governor Hamdard said that 93,000 families in the province have lost their harvest. Samangan Governor Shafaq explained that if the drought becomes more severe this year, they will need to double the depths of the wells or else 50,000 families will be forced to leave the province. The Ambassador responded that last year the USG provided 75

percent of the World Food Program's (WFP) budget in Afghanistan, and he added that he would raise the drought issue with the WFP. Governor Atta replied that the WFP had recently been to Mazar to investigate the problem.

COMMENT:

¶11. (SBU) The Northern governors clearly understand that the pressure is on to have poppy-free provinces. Zarar made it clear to them that he is holding them accountable. He repeatedly rejected any implied tradeoff between more economic assistance and their responsibility to deliver on poppy eradication. Zarar also made the same points forcefully in a joint press conference with Ambassador Neumann. Zarar said, "where there is poppy, there is no law, no justice, and no state." The addition of the Ambassador to the meeting was Zarar's initiative and he and the Ambassador discussed and coordinated their joint and separate messages beforehand. The governors seem to get the message. We would not necessarily believe that each will deliver, but Atta will, and that will influence others. We will look for ways to support them in return for their poppy eradication efforts, as this will both reinforce our message and provide them with some sorely needed assistance. We will also back up Zarar in making clear that, support or no support, they will be accountable for results. We were very struck with the successful PEP program and should consider expanding it.

END COMMENT.

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